

Numbers 22:23-41 - Thursday, December 16th, 2010

- Beginning here in Numbers chapter 22 and through chapter 25 we are introduced to an interesting individual by the name of Balaam.
- This Balaam is hired by Balak, King of the Moabites to pronounce a spiritual curse on the Israelites so they could be destroyed in battle.
- What makes this so interesting is that there are many references to Balaam in the scriptures, in both the Old and the New Testament.

Deuteronomy 23:4-5 because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. NKJV

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. NKJV

- We pick up the narrative where Balaam is now on his donkey and on his way to curse the Israelites with the hopes of getting very rich.

23 Now the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand, and the donkey turned aside out of the way and went into the field. So Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back onto the road. 24 Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on this side and a wall on that side. 25 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she pushed herself against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck her again. 26 Then the Angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. 27 And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.

- As I'm sure you're well aware, this is where it gets as interesting as it is humorous. Be that as it may, there are important lessons here.
- First, blocked goals cause one to lash out in anger. When someone stands in the way of Balaam's greedy goal he becomes abusive.
- Second, Balaam thinks it's God's will he go, and it's because of this, that he mistakenly perceives this, as an attack on him personally.
- This is textbook in that when we're out of God's will, we' mistakenly perceive adversity as an attack on us and not God trying to stop us.

28 Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"

- This is that famous verse that many a pastor, of which yours truly is chief, has, with an affectionate fondness, referred to many times.
- The Lord speaks through this donkey to Balaam, and asks him, what she's done to him, to deserve this beating from him, three times.

29 And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have abused me. I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would kill you!"

- It's been said that the craziest thing about this isn't that the donkey speaks to Balaam, rather it's that Balaam speaks to the donkey.
- Not only does he speak to the donkey, he lashes out at the donkey and tells her that if he had a sword in his hand he would kill her.
- Perhaps you'll indulge me for just a moment as I attempt to get through the humor of this, and answer a couple of questions about this.
- The first question is; "Why does the Lord choose to use a donkey to get through to Balaam?" Because he's acting like a stubborn mule.
- The second question is; "Why does Balaam talk back to the donkey?" Because when one disobeys God, they become animal like.

"Balaam did not seem to be either surprised or alarmed. He was familiar with supernatural wonders, and was moreover, so taken up with the one idea of gaining Balak's reward that he neither feared nor cared. Greed for gold hardens men's hearts beyond measure; this passion created the monster Judas and others of his class."

Charles Spurgeon

30 So the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden, ever since I became yours, to this day? Was I ever disposed to do this to you?" And he said, "No."

- So now we've got a full on argument between this donkey, and this man who is acting like a donkey, and it's the donkey who is winning.
- Notice what the donkey says. She asks him if she's ever acted like this in all the years that he's known her, and Balaam says; "no!"

31 Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the way with His drawn sword in His hand; and he bowed his head and fell flat on his face. 32 And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me. 33 The donkey saw Me and turned aside from Me these three times. If she had not turned aside from Me, surely I would also have killed you by now, and let her live."

- Well OK then, this sort of puts it into perspective. You might say that Balaam finally gets it. It's the Lord, and He has drawn His sword.
- The first thing that Balaam does right is to posture himself prostrate before the Lord, flat on his face as the Lord rebukes him to his face.
- The Lord goes as far as telling him, if it weren't for his donkey trying to stop him, the Lord would've spared the donkey and killed him.
- The Lord makes it clear that Balaam is going the wrong way, and has gone astray, because his evil love of money is the perverse way.

2 Peter 2:15-16 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. NKJV

Jude 1:11 Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. NKJV

34 And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back." 35 Then the Angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak." So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

- Please don't think for a minute that Balaam is sincere. This is not the godly sorrow that leads to change, it's the sorrow of being caught.
- I believe this for two reasons the first of which is, anyone sincere or not, is going to say this if the Lord is in front of them with His sword.
- The second reason, perhaps more telling, is that Balaam says; "IF it displeases You, I will turn back." If it's an if, then it's not sincere.
- It's for this reason that God still tells to go. Again God hasn't changed his mind, He knows that Balaam has already made up his mind.

"He yields under pressure, but his heart goes after gain. ...Knowing the right, ye yet desired to win the rewards of wrong doing and went as far into opposition of God's will as he dare."

Charles Spurgeon

36 Now when Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which is on the border at the Arnon, the boundary of the territory. 37 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not earnestly send to you, calling for you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honor you?"

- These two men deserve each other. They are both corrupt, and evil minds think alike. I think they are both delighted to see each other.
- Balak has something Balaam wants, Balaam has something Balak wants, and they are both just as hell bent on getting it as the other.

38 And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have come to you! Now, have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I must speak." 39 So Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kirjath Huzoth. 40 Then Balak offered oxen and sheep, and he sent some to Balaam and to the princes who were with him. 41 So it was, the next day, that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, that from there he might observe the extent of the people.

- This is interesting because it's as if Balaam is, by way of full disclosure, telling Balak that there is some "fine print" in their agreement.
- He couches it in a question saying; "have I any power at all to say anything? The word that God puts in my mouth that I must speak."
- Balaam is ever so deceptively leaving himself an out because deep down in his heart, he knows God won't let him curse the Israelites.
- The question is; "If he knows he can't pronounce a curse on them why does he continue to do it, knowing he won't get away with it?"
- That is the \$64,000 question, and it's one for which our continuing study of this account will provide a million dollar answer, next week!